

FCC Protest February 27, 2003

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FAQ

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

The argument for regulation in the public-interest hinges upon reliable factual evidence on the impact of deregulation on the ability of the media industry to maintain its democratic function.

On the academic front, several studies have shown how local news is becoming less local and less diverse. A number of industry assessments and reports by public-interest research and advocacy groups have also found similar dismal declining quality of localism and diversity.

Diversity in voices and views

The Radio-Television News Directors Association surveyed television stations around the country and discovered that racial parity at the decision-making level was far behind the rate of 27.1%. Last year, minorities held 8.7 percent of general manager jobs in television. (Radio-Television News Directors Association, www.rtna.org)

In Tampa, Florida, the owner of a local daily newspaper and television station moved both under the same roof. A "Multi-Media Desk" was created to facilitate editorial cooperation. although the editorial staffs are to remain "independent." Despite this independence, the newspaper's media critic was forced to stop criticizing the television station. (Center for Digital Democracy, www.democraticmedia.org)

A study by Harvard's Shorenstein Center shows that television news time devoted to international coverage dropped from 45 percent in the 1970s to less than 14 percent in 1995.

Localism

According to the Annenberg Public Policy Center, only 65 of about 1200 Educational/Informational shows were locally produced in 1999; commercial broadcasters generally receive all of their Educational/Informational programming from the network with which they are affiliated.

The Wall Street Journal reported that Clear Channel Radio uses technology and its enormous affiliate network to trick listeners into believing its radio announcers and programs are locally produced. Clear Channel serves as the premier example of loss of localism and diversity in a consolidated media landscape. It owns 1200 stations nationwide, replacing local radio personalities with automated programming.

Useful Web Sites

For more information on Michael Powell, including snapshots of him and his friends, visit his taxpayer financed Internet home page at: www.fcc.gov/commissioners/powell/Welcome.html

For more information on the policy plans to eliminate limits on media ownership limits, visit MediaChannel's in-depth guide at www.mediachannel.org/news/indepth/fcc

To learn more about the threats to open access and ways to combat them, check out the Center for Digital Democracy at www.democraticmedia.org.

For more great ideas, see recommendations for media rights announced at the World Social Forum at: <http://www.comunica.org/cris/>

For more information on Independent Media, please visit: <http://www.indymedia.org>

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Fears of the Impact of Ownership Reform Are Unjustified

- The FCC's newspaper/broadcast cross-ownership rule had little justification when it was adopted in 1975. Nothing since then provides any evidence that the rule has had any beneficial effect. It is a regulatory anachronism that must be repealed.
- Claims that radio consolidation has harmed the public are wrong. Since Congress authorized radio consolidation in 1996, investment in the radio industry and in new services has mushroomed, and the number of different program formats available to American consumers has steadily grown. Radio has become a stronger medium providing competition to other media outlets. The FCC should not change its local radio ownership rules or the way it defines radio markets.
- Reform of the FCC's local TV ownership rules is essential if vibrant local TV service is to continue in most American communities. Small and medium market TV stations are suffering from unprecedented financial pressures, including the costs of constructing digital facilities and ever-greater competition from cable. Many stations – particularly stations that do not lead their market in ratings – now are losing money. If the FCC does not permit ownership of more than one station in small and medium markets, the public in those markets will lose news service and may lose a substantial part of their free, over-the-air television service.
 - a The FCC's historic concerns to preserve localism and diversity require it to maintain the current national TV ownership cap. Allowing the large TV networks to own more of their local affiliates will reduce the ability of these local stations to choose the programming that will best serve their audiences, to influence network programming choices to reflect local tastes and will reduce the ability of local affiliates to provide a competitive check to network advertising prices.
- Of the 10 largest media sectors, the three least consolidated are TV stations, newspapers and radio.

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